Sequestration, Scholarship, Sentinel: The Post-Politics of Peace (and War)

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doi:10.1017/S0020743814001093

In Lebanon, diverse sociopolitical projects have sought to mend the wounds, repair the cracks, and overhaul the loss of the devastating civil war (1975–90). Experts and technopolitics have featured centrally in almost all of them. In my anthropological research on expertise on peace and crisis in Lebanon, I explore how, in the decades after the war, an abstract ideal of peace gave way to a distinct space occupied by diverse groups of experts. I analyze how a previously political aim was transformed into a professionalized field around which specialized knowledge domains were developed and technopolitical practices deployed. In this essay I briefly explore this new architecture of expert power based on the technopolitics of peace (and war) in the contemporary Middle East.

"Summer Camp Repairs Rifts after Nahr al-Bared Crisis," reads a headline in Lebanon's English-language *Daily Star* on 1 August 2008.[1] In the five-day summer school, funded by the governments of Italy and Spain and jointly organized by the UN Development Program (UNDP), the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, and the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, "young people from Lebanese and Palestinian communities were isolated in the mountains and encouraged to open a dialogue." According to the organizers, the goal—to ease tensions between Palestinian residents of the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp and Lebanese living near the camp—was achieved. Indeed, a UNDP official from Spain declared: "In five days they've been able to overcome these prejudices." The workshop, we are told, mended the wounds that the "crisis of Nahr al-Bared" had produced. Both the school and the reporting on it reflect a growing tendency among peacemakers to understand eruptions of political violence as temporary crises that can be addressed by the wide application of workshops in which citizens can "resolve" the crisis with the help of training from specialists.

This story is paradigmatic of the role that the conflict resolution workshop increasingly plays in efforts to define the problem with violence and design a response. A five-day-long workshop is described as a "successful" measure to "repair the rifts" of a series of events that featured the Lebanese National Army laying siege to and shelling a refugee camp of thirty thousand souls almost daily for four months. As a response to the *crisis*, Lebanese and Palestinians were "isolated" in the mountains. (It is remarkable, if not cynical, to suggest that for Palestinians, who have spent most of their lives in refugee camps, the best place to "overcome their prejudices" is yet another camp, even a "summer camp.") In my work I analyze the conflict resolution workshop as an assemblage of particular technomoral arrangements aimed at organizing (and disciplining) through sequestration the ways that bodies behave, move, and express feelings and opinions.

That is not all. Secluding bodies within a spatial arrangement that is distant from familiar environments is only one element of the disciplinary logic. The next move is to introduce the technical and the moral care of the self.[2]

This takes us beyond the rhetoric of *repair* of wounds, to the underlying assumptions about the constitution of the individuals in these workshops and the society at large. Arguably, the image that guides such interventions is one of a morally handicapped society finding itself in a generalized state of civil disintegration, indeed an uncivil society. Hence the (re)production of a professionalized field of peace experts, whose degree of legitimacy and institutional existence depends on their ability to master the binary between an intrinsically ignorant and potentially uncivil society (which needs to be trained) and themselves as experts (who need to train it).

A few weeks after the car-bomb assassination of Imad Mughniyeh, a top Hizbullah military commander, a panel discussion entitled "The Mughniyeh Assassination and the Hizbullah scholarship" was hosted by a Beirut-based think tank, with offices in London and Washington, D.C., and an Arabic news translation agency in one of Beirut's luxury hotels. During the Q&A, audience members questioned the label "Hizbullah scholarship" and the logic behind the event. They protested the carving out of a separate domain of expertise solely focused on this particular party, thus insinuating it as a gray zone between academia, journalism, and intelligence services.

Despite resistance to the term, "Hizbullah scholarship" continues to grow, especially after the party's successful military campaign against Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon (1978–2000). During my fieldwork, books, articles, and reports about Hizbullah had begun proliferating exponentially. However, there is no consensus among researchers about how to label the party. The list ranges from the most dismissive to the most supportive. Most researchers prefer what they consider the middle-of-the-road category of the "non-state actor." While this term means different things to different people,[3] it is hard to escape its normative undertones. Non-state actors are defined solely according to their antithetical position vis-à-vis the state. As a concept, "non-state actor" is abstract enough to include a variety of heterogeneous political formations and normative enough to signify an antithesis to the state, a negative marker opposed to the unmarked prototype.

In the context of Hizbullah scholarship, the use of the term is almost always normative, punctuated with presumptions of disloyalty. Among experts on civil society and governance, however, the antithesis to the state implied by similar terms is normatively positive. Thus, the "non-governmental organization" is perceived as the favorable counterpoint to a corrupt and undemocratic state. This discursive practice advanced by peace and development experts is often organized with the help of technopolitical arrangements, such as specialized documents and public events, like the aforementioned one. In my work, I show how "technonormatives"—the peculiar type of technopolitical practice that disseminates normative labels—is based on Eurocentric, statist, and culturalist ideas and informs contemporary peace and development expertise in Lebanon and elsewhere.[4]

On 25 January 2008, a car bomb exploded in Beirut, killing Lebanese army captain Wisam ʿEid, the official investigator of a series of assassinations of politicians, including former MP Rafiq al-Hariri. In the CrisisWatch report produced by the International Crisis Group (ICG), a figurative "bomb" appeared to signal the explosiveness of the

situation.[5] For ICG experts, the crisis report is a major tool for resolving conflicts around the globe. I suggest looking at the crisis report as a technopolitical tool that disseminates knowledge about crisis around the world, packaged in a universal format. I analyze the report as an assemblage of technical characteristics that help to shrink the world into the master format of the crisis expert, resembling the literary figures in tales by Jonathan Swift, Rabelais, and Lewis Carroll. Crisis reports combine analysis and recommendations, constituting both early warning micromechanisms and pocket-sized tools of crisis management. Each crisis report must master these two interrelated tasks. In Lebanon, this practice often blurs the already shaky boundary between knowledge for peacemaking and intelligence for state-led counterinsurgency operations, especially in the context of ongoing military conflict between Israel and Hizbullah. Crisis experts shake off the suspicion of partisanship by integrating the "data" into broader systems of alert-and-response that appear to represent not particular states and institutions but the universal desire for peacemaking and crisis resolution. Presupposed within the mechanism of the sentinel, they are masterfully diffused within the seemingly nonpartisan mechanism of crisis warning.

I argue that this technopolitics of crisis distributes and organizes spaces and subjectivities along the classic Greek use of the term that meant simultaneously "objective crisis" and "subjective critique/decision."[6] In the *space of crisis*, recalcitrant entities are placed under overt or covert forms of surveillance on the grounds of universal values and mechanisms. In the *space of decision* the observer's subjectivity is produced as part of a quasi-scientific system of alert-and-response to international threats, which increasingly resemble natural disasters. This new technopolitical ontology is successful because through it crisis bears a resemblance to a quasi-natural phenomenon. As such, the technopolitics of crisis implies a crucial difference between the observed and the observers. While the observed are guided by particular interests and parochial worldviews, and rooted in the old game of partisan politics, the observers—equipped with scientific mechanisms of analysis and alert—follow universal values and procedures, thus always already inhabiting a post-political world.[7]

Sequestration, scholarship, sentinel—the technopolitics of peace—are, I argue, part and parcel of a new architecture of expert power. I call this new form of power *Master Peace* for multiple reasons: it is produced by groups of experts who (claim to) master certain skills; it consolidates the authority of master rules over places, processes, and populations; it constructs master subjectivities divided into trainers and trainees, observers and observed, political and post-political; it deploys master devices and mechanisms in any context; it allows the technicians of peace to use scale, shrinking large political issues down to a peace camp, a crisis report, an academic label, thus enabling a crisis expert, a peace NGO, a specialized researcher to master peace, by altering the relative size of themselves and their objects; finally, it constitutes a globalized *master form* of post-politics from which further copies can be (un)made.[8]

NOTES

Author's note: I am grateful to Talal Asad, Timothy Mitchell, Miriam Ticktin, and Yasmine Khayyat for precious feedback.

[1]Jay Heisler, "Summer Camp Repairs Rifts after Nahr al-Bared Crisis," *Daily Star*, 1 August 2008.

[2]Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, "The Birth of the Workshop: Technomorals, Peace Expertise and the Care of the Self in the Middle East," *Public Culture* 26, no. 3 (2014); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

[3]Andrew Clapham, "Non-state Actors," in *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, ed. Vincent Chetail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 200–12.

[4]Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, "Towards an Anthropology of 'State Failure': Lebanon's Leviathan and the Peace Expertise," *Social Analysis* 55, no. 3 (2011): 115–42.

[5]International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch no. 54*, February 2008.

[6]Reinhardt Koselleck, "Crisis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 357–400.

[7]Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, "Sentinel Matters: The Technopolitics of Crisis in Lebanon (and Beyond)," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2014).

[8]I expand on this in my book project "Master Peace: Governing Violence in Postwar Lebanon."